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UNCLAS ABUJA 001265

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR INL/AAE AF/W
LAGOS FOR CG, INL AND DEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AVIATION SECURITY OFFICIALS SACKED OVER DRUG
INCIDENT

1. UNCLASSIFIED - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. The Nigerian press reported May 26 that two top aviation security officials were sacked "over drug trafficking." According to the reports, Captain Alhaji Balarabe Usman, Director of Aviation Security at the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) and Bello Ochea, the FAAN General Manager for Security were relieved for "aiding and abetting drug carriers through the Lagos airport."

3. According to DEA Lagos, two low level FAAN security officers at MMIA Lagos recently escorted two drug couriers directly to their plane, bypassing security and narcotics screening. The four were apprehended by NDLEA officials and are awaiting trial. Apparently, however, according to DEA CA, when Aviation Minister Babalola Borishade mentioned the incident to President Obasanjo, the president himself ordered that Usman and Ochea be sacked. At this point, no further action relating to this incident is anticipated.

4. Informed sources, both in and out of aviation, who know Usman well, insisted to INL LEA over the weekend that they would be shocked if Usman had any involvement in narcotics trafficking. One source, a Nigerian pilot, averred that the incident may have been contrived to discredit Usman and precipitate his removal. The same source claimed that it would be impossible for FAAN personnel to circumvent NDLEA screening without NDLEA cooperation. Since the couriers and escorts were apprehended, he may be right. He added that until dogs were employed at the airports, narcotics would pass freely in both directions - with the assistance of NDLEA officers. Campbell